Blood of the Pomegranate

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Blood of the Pomegranate

by one_point_perspective

Summary

Special Agent Will Graham holds a very unique gift—not just of empathy, but of mother nature. With every passing case, his mind and his botanical powers grow unstable. Will's fascinating potential catches the attention of Hannibal Lecter, King of the Underworld. Determined to keep his identity and leisurely activities a secret, Hannibal sends Will on a chase that lands him in the depths of Hell.

OR: How the Underworld got its second king.

Chrysanthemum indicum

Chapter Summary

> After consulting for a Ripper kill, Will's abilities get a little rowdy. On top of that, there's another serial killer in town.

Chapter Notes

> This is what happens when you take the pomegranate imagery/symbolism from the show and run with it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Red and blue lights painted the walls.

Will stood alone in the room as the metallic stench of blood infiltrated his senses. He closed his eyes, haunted, focused.

The pendulum swings.

In the darkness of his mind, the gruesome scene rebuilt itself, every detail rewound. Once he allowed his eyes to reopen, he stood before the cowering victim, a reanimated corpse. Contempt overtook him as the victim's eyes met his own. The killer had certainly been angry with the man.

"You've wronged me and you cannot take it back."

Will's palms wrapped around his throat, eyes locked on the man's jugular. He squeezed and he squeezed. His arms shook as the victim held on to him tightly, eyes wild and crowded with tears, pleading.

Will felt the urge to shake his head.

“I’ve heard all I need to hear from you. I’ll show you what it’s like to have no voice at all.”

The victim sputtered, his mouth trying to form words, begging.

It’s too late for sorry.

“I’ll take what I need from you, but you can keep your tongue. In fact, it’ll be in your hands. A constant reminder of what you can no longer say.”

The man, now slumped over on the floor, sat passively in front of Will.

“You will be offering it up to everyone. They can speak for you, but you will never be able to do the same.”

He positioned the victim into his desired pose, kneeled on the floor, arms raised. His severed tongue placed in his palms, waiting.

“This is my design.”

Will continued to run the scenario through his mind, the emotions playing right in front of him. It was clear as day. Anger, reckoning, the sweet taste of justice—

“Does that always happen when you do that?” Beverly’s voice immediately snapped Will back to the present. His body faced her as he questioned her with the rise of his brow.

It was only then that he noticed her gaze was fixed on his left arm. It did feel unusually tight as he moved it closer to his vision.

Will was not able to fully hide his panic when he was met with a very green vine wrapped aggressively around his forearm. It was riddled with healthy leaves. It slithered from beneath the rolled up sleeve of his shirt, along his wrist, and wrapped around his fingertips. It tickled, almost, yet it did not leave Will with any desire to smile.

“You’re not supposed to be in here,” He replied, his demeanor almost coming off as a challenge.

“That’s what Jack was trying so desperately to hide about you, then,” Beverly turned slightly away from him, her eyes still focused on the plant that snaked down his arm. Will promptly tugged his sleeve down as he huffed. “Identified the vic.”

Jack Crawford, annoyed and without a good amount of patience, barged into the room, staring Beverly down. “What are you doing in here?”

“Identified the vic; James Wright. His record is squeaky clean.”

“Not a case of personally delivered justice, then,” Jack’s assessment made Will visibly squirm. Jack focused his attention back on him, cutting away from Beverly as he went closer to Will. “What are you thinking, Will?”

“No, this is more than that. This is personal. This is a *punishment* .” Wrath filled his body. The anger from his vision returned to him, shaking him, taking hold of him. The vine pulsed, constricted his arm. He attempted to shake the feeling of it.

“A punishment?” Jack stared him down, eyebrow raised. Will inhaled sharply as he tried to gather his thoughts. He pretended not to notice the way Jack’s eyes temporarily flickered downward to spot the small leaves peeking out from his sleeve.

“The killer was delivering his own justice. Displayed him like this, as a warning. He made an example of him.”

A beat passed.

“Could this be the Ripper?”

Will took in a deep breath.

“Yes.”

Jack, abruptly charged with energy, shot Will with a flurry of questions about the Ripper. Will could feel the answers leave his mouth, yet he could not hear them. Could not completely understand them. His mind was elsewhere.

—

A whistle broke through the evening air, a signal that all of Will Graham’s dogs recognized. Several sets of paws dashed through the grass. It was a small race; who could reach their dinner bowls first? Will watched them as they all gradually found themselves on the porch once again, small bits of food strewn about as they ate, tails wagging happily.

The pack rushed inside as Will closed the door behind them. He placed his face in his palms and rubbed his eyes as he cut across the room, directly to the bathroom. Once his shirt was discarded and carelessly dropped on the floor, his gaze scanned the plant that surrounded his arm. The leaves had since gotten slightly larger, and it had sprouted a few tiny flowers, its petals dusted with a light honey color.

He recognized it almost immediately.

He was overly familiar with the flora that had the tendency to sprout from his fingertips, yet he could not recall a time when it felt so *agitated* .

It was even further bizarre when it seemed he couldn’t get it to budge.

His plants loved to sprout of their own accord, so much so that it became a daily expectation, but rarely was it that he was unable to get them under control.

Hand trembling, Will brought it closer, a glare plastered on his features.

The *Thunbergia alata* that enveloped itself around his palm glared right back at him.

Moonlight seeped in through the windows and cast shadows of trees against the ceiling. All seven dogs found themselves in a natural array around Will's bed, with the exception of Buster, who preferred to sleep directly against Will's legs. Sleep had captured him roughly two hours ago, but even in an unconscious state, he couldn't shake the feeling of discomfort that stirred in his chest.

Pressure descended upon his neck in a sensation that sent his eyes flying wide open. His right hand darted to his throat to investigate, and found nothing. A cough still made its way out of him, sending him into a choking fit, until black fluid sputtered out of his mouth and drizzled down his chin.

It wasn't until he was gasping for air when he noticed his other hand had raised of its own accord, fingers encased around an almost-gelatinous object. Stronger now than ever before, the vine pulsed at the same rate as his heartbeat as it held his limb hostage. His fingers were forced open to reveal a sludgy piece of flesh. The unique bumpy texture made it easy to identify it—a freshly harvested tongue.

Will found that he was unable to do much else but watch as his blood-coated hand inched toward him, the barbarous alternative of having it served to him on a silver platter. The slimy tongue pushed past his lips and forced another choking fit.

Your words are now mine.

The words echoed in his brain as he jolted awake, gasping, reeling, soaked in sweat. A groan left him as he peeled away his shirt. Beneath the fabric, he discovered tendrils of leaves and stems branched across his shoulders; from them a small chrysanthemum had bloomed over his left collarbone. The sight of it caused him to irately fling himself out of bed and grab the closest towel he could find.

He flopped back down on the mattress with the towel spread beneath him—not before drying his face with it—and heaved a heavy sigh.

It was not to be the most restful night, it seemed.

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The following morning placed Will in Quantico.

A large board crowded with pictures of victims, older and recent, stood adjacent to his chair. Each one depicted young women with hauntingly similar features, and they all stared straight through him, the tales of their innocence displayed in their eyes.

A serial killer was on the loose, and it wasn't the Chesapeake Ripper.

Jack sat behind his desk as he explained the freshly-acquired details of the case. Though Will's eyes remained fixed on the table in front of him, he could see through his peripherals that even though Jack was addressing them both, his body faced Doctor Hannibal Lecter.

Said doctor was standing before the board as he focused a good portion of his attention on the details of each photo.

"—Some genius in Duluth PD took a picture of Elise Nichols' body with their phone and shared it with a few close friends. Freddie Lounds ran it on Tattlecrime.com."

The mention of Elise Nichols threw Will for a quick loop.

"Tasteless," Will was quick to voice his displeasure. The very thought of Freddie's attempts to get her hands on anything she could acquire for Tattlecrime.com made him recoil. He could already feel a stray leaf or two begin to form somewhere in his hair.

"Do you have trouble with taste?" Lecter's question caused him to narrow his eyes. His attention had derailed a little too much from the present discussion for Will's comfort.

There were interesting words that could be said about Dr. Lecter. Despite having only been introduced minutes ago, their minimal exchanged pleasantries left a small impression on him. His presence was commanding yet modest. He also clearly cared about his appearance—gathered by his tailored beige suit and carefully styled hair.

That would have been all fine and good, if it wasn't for the nagging feeling that tugged inside of Will.

"My thoughts are often not tasty," he replied, almost as a rebuttal of sorts. Hannibal turned completely away from the board and faced him head on.

"Nor mine. No effective barriers. Especially when displayed," Hannibal responded pointedly. He moved away from the board completely and circled the table to take a seat next to Will. An attempt, or a statement.

Will ignored his direct acknowledgment of the leaves that had in fact sprouted on his head. "I make forts."

"Associations come quickly."

"So do forts."

Will could feel Hannibal's gaze on him, but he kept his own focused on the table. He adjusted his glasses as the doctor spoke once again.

"Not fond of eye contact, are you?" His intense stare remained on Will. Finally, he turned his head in Hannibal's direction.

"Eyes are distracting. You see too much. You don't see enough. And it's hard to focus when you're thinking, oh, those whites are really white, or they must have hepatitis, or is that a burst vein? So I try to avoid eyes whenever possible." Hannibal allowed himself a small chuckle at his answer. Even with his argument, Will's eyes barely left his while he had spoken.

"I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind, right to the core. Your values and decency are present yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams. No forts in the bone arena of your skull for the things you love, only luscious gardens to nurture. Gardens that manifest from your connections." Of course, he just described Will with immense accuracy. His eyes bounced between Will's face and the persistent leaves upon his head. Will's eyebrows furrowed.

"Whose profile are you working on?" The demand in Will's tone carried through the room as his head snapped toward Jack. "Whose profile is he working on?"

Jack's mouth opened to speak before he was instantly cut off.

"I'm sorry, Will. Observing is what we do. I can't shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off." Will immediately shook his head at the response. The wrath in his glare persisted as he responded.

"Please don't psychoanalyze me. You won't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed." He stood quickly from his chair. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go give a lecture on psychoanalyzing." With that, he was out the door, and down the hall.

Jack stared at the door, slightly troubled. "Maybe we shouldn't poke him like that, doctor. Maybe use a less direct approach."

Hannibal leaned forward in his seat. His demeanor was entirely professional, even as an undetectable flicker of chaos danced behind his eyes.

"What he has is pure empathy. And projection, both mentally and physically. He can assume your point of view, or mine—and maybe some other points of view that scare him. Those points of view, and his emotions regarding them, can manifest physically as their own lifeforms. It's an uncomfortable gift, Jack. Perception's a tool that's pointed on both ends."

The explanation was simple enough, as Jack seemed to agree. A perfect summary of Will's mind and abilities.

However, it didn't encompass the possibilities of what he *could* do.

Hannibal Lecter thought of the delicate yet sharp-looking leaves that Will Graham had unintentionally created.

A beautiful gift, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

And so it begins!
I'm happy to finally have an outlet where I can play around with floriography. It's neat stuff. I'm also extra excited because all of the main events for this fic are lined out, and it's wild.
Constructive criticism is welcome!
Thank you for reading the first installment of Blood of the Pomegranate.

Awakening

Chapter Summary

Will Graham (and his plants) get to have a little murder, as a treat.

Chapter Notes

If you'd like to set the mood/tone/vibe for this while reading, I put together a small spotify playlist!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Crunch. Crunch.

Grass broke beneath a significant weight in the field. It was a distant sound behind him. Distant enough to ignore.

Will could not ignore the branches that engulfed him, though.

They burst from the ground beneath his feet and climbed up his legs. Each dim branch was adorned with thorns, intricately crafted to pierce him where it mattered. He did nothing to stop them—merely surveyed them as they worked up his body. It was hypnotizing.

The vigorous *curiosity* of the branches drummed in his chest. Curiosity was common to feel in plants, especially his own. They happened to be naturally curious beings.

A thorn pierced a particularly sensitive area on his side, and for a moment he wondered if the branches had been of his own creation, or simply a gift from the meadow of his mind.

He decided on the latter.

Will's attention was forcefully drawn back to the sound behind him when it steadily grew louder. Cautious steps, yet heavy. The footsteps belonged to no human.

Crunch. Crunch.

Legs grounded to the field, he attempted to look over his shoulder as much as he could to face the beast. A beast it was, indeed. It was the largest stag he'd ever seen, colored pitch black. Its antlers were a whole other story. They seemed impossibly large in proportion to its body. The edges were remarkably sharp, ready to cut through anything that got in its way.

It crept closer to him, eyeing him, studying him. The deep night of its eyes harbored a look of inquisitiveness; nearly the kind that the branches brewed in him. Will almost felt the same for the towering creature. It inched forward, and there was nowhere to run.

Steps turned to roars. The noise echoed in his head.

Bang. Bang.

Frozen, he looked on as the stag's gait built speed.

Bang. Bang.

The deafening sound had grown hollow, almost. A knock.

Knock-knock.

The stag all but hurled itself at him, antlers aimed, ready—

Will stumbled awake as another knock rang in his ears. Bright morning light hit him directly in the eyes through a gap in the motel curtain. Disgruntled and rather sweaty, he scanned the room, the memories of the previous day coming back to him. A vivid image of Cassie's body mounted on the antlers of a taxidermy shook him back to the present.

He found himself in Minneapolis after the FBI had received word that the Minnesota Shrike had stricken again. Yesterday he'd entered the mind of a killer yet again—not before he received a stern reminder from Jack that his focus would be returned to the Ripper as soon as they were finished there. Typical.

Will retrieved a robe as he headed for the door, not entirely enthused to be greeting a guest considering the hour. The door opened with a click, and suddenly he was even less enthused. Hannibal, bearing a thermal storage bag, stared at him expectantly. Will almost found his well-fitted suit annoying.

"Good morning, Will. May I come in?" Hannibal's poise was maintained as Will simply stared at him. He then glanced outside at the view behind the man who stood in the doorway, uninvited.

"Where's Crawford?" He asked. Apprehension lurked in his tone.

"Deposed in court. The adventure will be yours and mine today," Hannibal stated, a friendly grin upon his features. Will glanced down to the bag he held. "May I come in?"

A small sigh escaped his nose as he stepped back to let him in. Hannibal's shoulder brushed past his own as he set up shop on the table that was tucked against the window. From the bag two tupperware containers were pulled, as well as place settings, two cups, and a thermos. Will found that he was simultaneously amused and irked by the elaborate set up. To Hannibal's credit, the contents of the tupperware looked positively scrumptious. Once the table had been set to Hannibal's liking, he invited Will to sit across from him.

“I’m very careful about what I put into my body. Which means I end up preparing most meals myself,” he explained. He gripped the thermos and poured a generous amount of coffee in both cups before handing one to Will. Fresh, Will thought, when he brought the cup to his lips and took a sip. “A little protein scramble to start the day. Some eggs, some sausage.”

Hannibal passed one of the tupperware containers to him, and he certainly didn’t hesitate to dig in. The first bite had been so satisfactory that he hadn’t noticed Hannibal’s eyes on him.

“It’s delicious, thank you.” He went in for his second forkful when he looked up, marginally surprised by the unexpected eye contact.

“My pleasure.” Hannibal finally picked up his silverware and began his own meal, having successfully masked his amusement along the way. He glimpsed back at Will while he delicately scooped a bit of sausage onto his fork. Rather interesting a sight, though, was a tiny dark shoot that peeked out of the top of Will’s shirt and branched very lightly up the left side of his neck. It was impossible to look away. “Long night?”

Hannibal’s question prompted him to look back up from his breakfast. He furrowed his brow and followed the direction of his gaze, before the realization that it landed on the base of his neck. He brought his hand up, and to his bewilderment, felt the small shoot brush his fingertips. It was quick work to get rid of as it disappeared beneath his touch.

“No,” he immediately denied. Hannibal’s vision lingered on where the plant had vanished before he changed the subject.

“I would apologize for my analytical ambush but I know I will soon be apologizing again and you’ll tire of that eventually, so I have to consider using apologies sparingly.”

Will swallowed another bite of eggs and paused before his answer, “Just keep it professional.”

“Or we could socialize like adults, god forbid we become friendly.”

“I don’t find you that interesting.”

Hannibal grinned ever so slightly. “You will.”

At that, Will raised an eyebrow, but ultimately decided not to give him the satisfaction of a reply and returned his attention to the protein scramble.

“Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for monsters.” Hannibal settled on another subject.

“That’s a superstition.” His counter was short and quick. Conversation wise, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to keep it up.

“And a natural affinity for botany,” the man across from him continued as if Will had not said anything.

A laugh-scoff escaped him, “ *Natural affinity* is a gross understatement.”

Just barely, Hannibal held back his smirk.

“I called your good friend Dr. Bloom about you. She wouldn’t gossip, not a word. She’s very protective of you. Smitten, I would say. She asked me to keep an eye on you.”

Upon the mention of Alana Bloom’s name, Will’s attention jumped a bit. *She had protected him* . However he didn’t utter a word about her, and instead studied Hannibal cautiously.

“I don’t think the Shrike killed that girl in the field.” Will thought the subject change was necessary. Hannibal hummed.

“The devil is in the details. What didn’t your Copy Cat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?” His inquisitiveness was a bit too eager for Will’s liking.

Thoughts from the Copy Cat’s mind leaped around in his own. The distress that came of looking through a killer’s eyes clouded him, when he should’ve been used to it. At the very least, able to filter it out. Unshakeable was the understanding of beasts.

“Everything. It’s like he had to show me a negative so I could see the positive. That crime scene was practically gift-wrapped.”

Gift-wrapped a little too flawlessly.

“The mathematics of human behavior. All those ugly variables. Some bad math with this Shrike fellow. Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?”

“He has a few.”

“Ever have any problems, Will?”

Will almost believed he was hallucinating when he thought he saw the man wink. “No.”

“Of course you don’t,” he said as a matter-of-factly, “You and I are just alike. Problem free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about.” Hannibal leaned just barely back in his chair before he spoke again.

“I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little potted plant, frail ceramic saved for special herbs. The plant itself is thriving, but the pot can be broken easily.”

When their eyes met again, there was a dash of challenge.

“How do you see me?” The question burned on Will’s tongue.

“The thorn bush I want in the garden when the rabbits hop by,” his tone was cool, “Finish your breakfast.”

—

A sizable portion of their morning was spent inside a rental car. Their leads had ended them up in places all over Minneapolis, until it delivered them to a construction site that sat nearby town. Once the car was thrown into park, Will began to unbuckle his seatbelt when he noticed the smile that rested on Hannibal's face.

"What are you smiling about?"

"Peeking behind the curtain. Curious how the FBI goes about its business when it isn't kicking in doors." The car doors slammed shut behind them as they exited. Will perceived the reply as mildly entertaining. That's what the doctor had been like all day, alongside irritatingly analytical.

"Nothing really exciting enough to be smiling about, unfortunately. We're lucky we're not doing house to house interviews." Both of them shared a glance, and Will temporarily indulged him in an amused smile to match him. However it was gone as fast as he had focused his attention back to the case at hand. "We found a little piece of metal in the clothes Elise Nichols had on. A shred from a pipe threader."

Hannibal gave him a look. "Jack Crawford wants me to make sure you're of sound mind and body… to look for metal pipe threaders?" A nod of confirmation.

"That's between you and Jack."

The hunt was not a fruitless one. Between the camper trailer office and the apprehensive secretary, a valuable file turned up—one that contained the name of Garrett Jacob Hobbs. It hadn't taken terribly long to track down his address.

The rental car sat across from a quaint house in Bloomington, Minnesota. Lecter was already halfway out of the passenger's side when Will popped an Aspirin into his mouth. It took him a moment and a deep breath before he evacuated the car, and luckily but not surprisingly, Hannibal was courteous enough to wait for him. He decided to pay no mind to the discomfort he experienced when he noticed the eager smile Hannibal wore.

Steady yet rough was their rhythm when they marched to the door. Grass crushed beneath them; a familiar sound. Halfway there. Will prepared himself to knock on the front door—

The front door that had burst open. The front door that had revealed Louise Hobbs, gasping, stumbling. The front door that had slammed behind her, leaving her to the clutches of death.

Breath ragged, Will all but sprinted to the porch where Louise Hobbs collapsed. He lost feeling as adrenaline began to run its course through his veins. He grasped at her, hands not entirely sure where to go. Blood pooled around her form in such a way that framed the

fairness of her skin. Her red fingers gripped his wrist. Crimson painted him when he pried them away.

His eyes, glazed over by that point, were drawn to the door once again. A sickening crack sounded when he slammed himself against it. Whether it was the wooden frame or his shoulder, it didn't matter. Thorny vines, inconsolable, furious, unapologetically shrouded Will's arms and shoulders. They served well to help reduce the door to splintered chunks of wood. He stumbled through the entrance and righted his footing as best as he could.

The house was a maze. The walls told stories of fond memories; a warm family portrait, now concealed under gore.

Will Graham's gun should have been at the ready.

Instead he darted in and out of rooms, his arms—they looked no different from a terrarium—firm by his sides.

"Garrett Jacob Hobbs? FBI!"

A step into the next room brought him to view the layout of a kitchen. The picture was perfectly domestic, save for the serial murderer that stood in the middle of it, a knife in one hand, teenage daughter in the other. The blade hovered just above her neck, eager, inevitable.

Will thought not of the hand that ought to have reached for his weapon.

He thought not of what his prior training in the field would have directed him to do.

Only of the vicious vines that hurled themselves from his being and ripped straight into the exposed chest of Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

A set of branches pulled themselves back from the initial wound and took another plunge into the man, his blood the image of a grand river as it trickled among the grooves and thorns.

Will looked on when Hobbs' face contorted in agony. Mouth opened wide, quivering, yet he could not hear a single scream or wail.

The force of a scream threatened to tear through his own throat.

On his way down, Hobbs had managed to meet his knife to Abigail's skin. One slash was all it took. The branches continued their ruthless onslaught on Hobbs' flesh long after he'd crumbled against the counter behind him.

A wheeze sounded from Abigail when she collided with the kitchen floor. Her chest desperately rose and fell with each attempted breath, regardless of how futile it was. Will's hand was pressed against the bloodied fountain of her neck before he was able to process that he'd kneeled next to her. Gasp after distraught gasp joined together from the two of them, a macabre symphony that would echo through the halls of the dwelling for years to come.

"See?"

Will whirled his head around to find Hobbs, slumped in front of the reddened counter, thorn-embellished tendrils scattered about, with a burning stare that carved directly into him. The corners of Garrett's mouth were turned upwards in a heinous grin. All-knowing. Smugness born not of understanding, but of mockery. A twisted sort of guidance.

Movement tore him from his trance—the familiar twisting and turning of greenery around one of his arms. Monstrous in size, the plant glided from his limb, past the tips of his fingers, and across a portion of the room to land on Hobbs' skin. A connective branch in all its splendor. Bound. Garrett Jacob Hobbs, impaled on Will's confounding creation.

The perching bird being returned to its nest.

" See? "

Hannibal's swift movement beside Abigail rattled Will away from the punctured man. Hannibal's trained hands addressed her laceration while her vision had drifted to her perishing father. A gentle and trembling hand guided her away; their icy eyes locked together.

Will didn't dare look away.

Outside was a circus of emergency vehicles and officers.

Gait eerily calm, Will made his way through the festivities. There had been an unspoken and unanimous agreement to leave him mostly untouched—save for the endeavor that was cutting him and his branches loose from Hobbs' corpse—until Abigail and her parents were evacuated from the house. A handful of officers offered a sideways glance when he passed by. He couldn't spot every single one that looked his way, courtesy of the splatter of blood that garnished his glasses. Nobody tried to call for his attention, and if they did, it wouldn't have mattered; any and all noise was dulled.

His mind hardly acknowledged his blood-drenched clothes or the fact that he was plant-free for the most part. The exception was the visible evidence of where the thorns had nicked him, alongside bits and pieces of leaves that made residence between the folds of his shirt. Tiny things, compared to the complimentary herbaceous arrangement he'd made of Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

However he was forced to acknowledge the girl he orphaned when she passed him on a stretcher. Paramedics were clustered around her when they loaded her into the ambulance. His eye caught Hannibal among the group. In return, he seemed to notice, and made very brief eye contact. His stare displayed concern and calmness along with something else Will couldn't completely discern. He noticed Abigail's hand gripped in his own when he looked away and crawled in beside her. Will, frozen in place, continued to stare even when the doors slammed shut behind them.

The trek to the rental car hadn't commenced again until the ambulance peeled away in a gust of sirens and flashing lights. A few steps forward, Will winced, his upper right arm and shoulder having been disturbed. Fluid movement, slippery. He shook his head in an act of

self-assurance—and chose to completely ignore the recognizable sensation of botany migrating up his body.

No one commented on the deep purple blooms that revealed themselves from underneath the cuff of his sleeve and amid the rips in his shirt.

No one dared to gawk too long at the ample array of aconitum that stood tall and proud on Will Graham's skin.

—

The trip to the hospital had not been long. A freshly cleaned Will advanced down the fluorescent hallway and eyed the room numbers as he passed by. The maze eventually led him to the room that contained unconscious Abigail.

Upon entry, the dominant scent of sanitizer and various other cleaning solutions practically slapped him in the face. He was also met with the sight of multiple machines crowded together, all hooked up to the same source. Abigail appeared pale, sickly, yet calm in her slumber. Hefty bandages covered half of her neck.

Will stepped in further, when he noticed Hannibal, head bowed, also unconscious, seated in a chair directly next to her bed. His gaze drifted down to the doctor's hand, intertwined with Abigail's. Fleeting the thought, he wondered if Hannibal had even let go since he last saw them.

The image of them vaguely reminded him of an elaborate painting, made up of visible yet gentle brushstrokes, colors merged in both stark contrast and perfect harmony. Two subjects wholly enveloped in their own plane of existence, oblivious to the viewer. Will grew closer to the canvas.

Hushed movements allowed another chair to be pulled closer to the bed. Settled, his focus lingered between the two of them.

Hannibal Lecter and himself were arranged next to each other, keeping guard of the girl they both saved.

Will felt his mind as it began to calm.

Chapter End Notes

Who's the Shrike now, Will?
Writing through the necessary plot points of season one is definitely testing my patience,

build up is both my favorite and least favorite part to do. Thankfully Hannibal and Will are interesting to write about.
I plan to update every Monday. :)
Thank you for reading!

Sticks and Stones

Chapter Summary

Will gets talked into having a conversation with Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

My apologies for this chapter being a tad bit late.
Excited for the Hannibal POV in this one! What does the Underworld's king get up to while in his person suit?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will drifted through the halls of the FBI Academy. Harsh lights glared down at him as he passed by a handful of lingering people. He kept his gaze strictly forward, even with the sense of their eyes on him. He'd long grown accustomed to it. After all, he knew exactly why he was such a spectacle that day.

The corridors hardly looked any different than they had a couple of days ago, apart from the buzz in the air that he hadn't taken notice of until that moment. Loud. Too loud. Lights, too bright. Blinding. Will blinked. The curls of his hair grazed his forehead when he shook his head.

When he was caught up with himself again, he stood a few feet away from the door to the lecture hall. He pushed his glasses up with an inhale.

A sharp wave of sound bombarded him the second he entered the room. Rapid, sincere applause. Unexpected. Unwelcome. Heavy storm clouds of his students' approval soaked him in praise, the thundering disturbance of it all not too far behind. He tried to wave them off with a vague gesture to no avail. They remained on their feet, clapping.

"Thank you," his acknowledgement was half-hearted, and it did nothing to cease the standing ovation. His jaw tightened. "Please stop that."

The severity that colored his tone proved to be effective. They all were quick to return to their seats, and by the time Will reached his desk, stillness had taken the room once again. He dumped his briefcase on the desk with a *thud* . He leaped right into the lecture, no time to waste. Lights dimmed, he directed everyone's attention to the slide that displayed Hobbs' resignation letter. His voice carried through the room when he spoke, enough where he could keep his body faced away from the students, sight set on the letter.

“This is how I caught Garrett Jacob Hobbs. It’s his resignation letter. Anybody see the clue?” Will turned his head to view a few raised hands sprinkled in the crowd. The sight of it wasn’t a surprise in the least, seeing as they hadn’t truly known what they applauded him for moments ago. He disregarded the raised hands before he went on, “There isn’t one. He wrote a letter, left his phone number… but no address. That’s it.”

Click . The next slide revealed an eerie photo of the Hobbs’ kitchen draped in ribbons of blood, Hobbs’ body notably missing from the picture. Will also observed the lack of branch remnants that had still been strewn on the floor when he exited the house that day. A brief thought crossed his mind of the removal process of the fragments for photography’s sake.

“Bad bookkeeping and dumb luck.”

His own voice trailed away from him when he zeroed in on the picture. The image’s gruesome kitchen stretched outward. It circled him. Stolen from the classroom, his mind staggered, forced to face the crime scene once more. He should have had it completely memorized by then, in light of the frequency in which it plagued his slumber; though it would have been denial to say it wasn’t cemented in his memory.

The choreographed act that followed was very much muscle memory. Abigail, laid on the linoleum, stained with the paint of her own slashed windpipe. Will’s hand, a barrier between her wound and the world. Glassy eyes met glassy eyes in an attempt to prevent the girl from witnessing the demise of her father. A hiss that rips Will away from his concentration on Abigail. When he turns to look, he finds Hobbs perforated on a thicket of Will’s own enactment. Tethered.

Even then, Hobbs still sustained a perverse smirk.

“See?”

Click . The ravaged kitchen vanished and welcomed a portrait of great contrast in its stead. Gore was replaced by genial smiles. They looked nothing like the version of themselves that resided in his head. Hobbs and his daughter both grinned brightly at everyone in the room in a show of joy from their previous hunting trip, and no matter how Will shifted behind his desk, their eyes always seemed to settle on him.

Will hastily eliminated a miniscule root that had begun to slide around his wrist.

“Garrett Jacob Hobbs is dead. The question now is how to stop those his story is going to inspire.” He further examined the picture and noted the cheerful Abigail before— *click* — Cassie spread across a set of antlers visibly darkened the room. Jarring, the change. Unharmonious figures merged in circumstance. Will’s scrutiny jumped from the screen to the blurred mass of students. “He’s already got one admirer.”

Packets of papers tapped against the top of the desk as Will straightened them and secured them away in his briefcase. He lagged behind the herd of trainees that gradually filed out of the room, and avoided eye contact with any of them.

Light perfume drifted to the desk and prompted him to look up. Alana grazed past the crowd, focus kept straight ahead. She elicited a familiar smile when they caught sight of each other.

“Hi. How are you, Will?” Her presence was an anchor in the ocean’s mighty waves. Will breathed a sigh then followed it up with a tiny smile in return.

“I have no idea,” it was complete honesty on his part, but he appreciated the visible amusement from his friend. Concern etched its way into her features after a quick glance over her shoulder. Will’s smile faded.

“That may change. I didn’t want you to be ambushed—”

He cocked his head. “Is this an ambush?’

“Ambush is later. Immediately later, soon to now. When Jack arrives consider yourself ambushed,” Alana had barely gotten her entire sentence out before an assertive presence stopped in the doorway.

“Here’s Jack.” It was meant to be a mumble, merely a passing comment between Alana and himself, but that clearly was foiled when Jack parked himself directly next to them. Jack’s full attention fell to the man in front of him.

“How was class?” An innocent question by itself. Will knew better though.

“They applauded, it was inappropriate.”

“Review board begs to differ. You’re up for a commendation and they okayed active return to the field. They also requested an evaluation, however,” Jack’s words took time to sink in. Will could feel Alana look over at him, expectant of an immediate reaction. He absorbed the news instead.

“What kind of an evaluation?” He didn’t bother to hide his apprehension. He already knew the answer.

“An evaluation of your *gift* , to be on the safe side. They want to be sure that you still have regulation. The force of what you made was impressive. A little too impressive,” Jack declared, focused squarely on Will’s face. Out of the corner of Will’s eye Alana turned sharply towards him. If she was concerned before, she was troubled now. Jack added, “I also recommended a psych evaluation. I need you to go back in the field, Will. The Ripper is still out there.”

It wouldn’t have been a conversation with Jack Crawford without a mention of the Ripper. Jack’s determination to catch him had plunged into obsession territory in record time. Frustration unavoidably emerged as a result of the Ripper’s constant evasion, enough so that it had become a personal matter. Nonetheless, that particular moment of Jack’s fixation was understandable. Another Ripper kill was due in a slim number of weeks.

Will gave Alana an apologetic look. “Are we starting now?”

The question evidently caught her by surprise. “Session wouldn’t be with me,” Her clarification did not come as a shock, but it wasn’t long before suspicion reached Will again.

“Hannibal Lecter might be a better fit. Your relationship’s not as personal. But if you’d be more comfortable with Dr. Bloom—”

Suspicion confirmed . “I’m not going to be comfortable with anybody inside my head.”

Alana could not mask the pleading look in her stare. “You’ve never killed anyone before, Will. It’s a deadly force encounter. It’s a lot to digest.”

“I used to work homicide. I’ve got a good metabolism.” His dismissive tone caused Alana and Jack to share a glance. Unspoken, their conversation, yet agreement settled between the two. He glowered at them.

“Reason you currently ‘used to’ work homicide is you couldn’t stomach pulling the trigger. You didn’t pull the trigger this time either—only because you decorated your tree using Garrett Jacob Hobbs.”

A pause fell on the three of them. Jack’s unique choice of words stirred something in Will. His frown deepened.

“So the psych eval’s not a formality?” Hints of impatience dripped in his query. The men’s stances mirrored each other. A face off.

“It’s so I can sleep. I asked you to get close to Hobbs and I need to know you didn’t get too close. How many times have you spent the night in Abigail Hobbs’ hospital room?”

Will’s stomach churned. He shook off the thinly veiled aggression. Crawford’s question would remain unanswered, but it prompted remembrance of the night before, when he had once again slept in a chair across from Abigail’s bed.

“Therapy doesn’t work on me,” he shot back. Alana, the jury, surveyed their clash.

“‘Cause you won’t let it.”

“‘Cause I know all the tricks.”

“Un-learn some tricks.”

Alana took that as her cue to cut in. “Why not have a conversation with Hannibal? He was there. He knows what you went through,” she urged, with the right amount of familiarity and the right amount of sternness.

A mental picture of Hannibal assessing Abigail’s gash flashed in his mind.

“I need my beauty sleep, Will,” Jack tagged on. Alana beamed, the embodiment of support.

Will did not enjoy being backed into a corner.

—

Hannibal was rather pleased with himself when he reviewed the contents of a piece of fine stationery. *Exceptional* . He lightly slid it across the table, for it to be interrupted by his guest's hand.

"What's this?" Will lifted it and brought it to his view, performing his own scan on it. Hannibal examined as Will's face twisted, an eyebrow raised.

"Your psychological evaluation. You're totally functional and more or less sane," he spoke smoothly and caught Will's eye, "Well done."

"I don't suppose you were any less thorough than my other evaluation," Will shrugged, a clear attempt to discard the displeasure he presented at the thought of it. Hannibal fleetingly pondered what exactly they had done to test his abilities. Taken him to the nearest greenhouse, perhaps? Placed houseplants in front of him and told him to manipulate them in various ways? Something improvised, as they were without previous protocol. Will continued, "Now you, too, have rubber stamped me."

His accusation did nothing to deter the astute grin Hannibal wore.

"Jack Crawford may lay his weary head to rest knowing he didn't break you and our conversation can proceed unobstructed by paperwork," he affirmed. The man seated across from him studied him for a brief moment. Hannibal could see the different phases of Will's train of thought as it gleamed in his eyes.

Will leaned forward a little in his chair; he came across as partially more relaxed than he had when he first entered the office. Amidst their earlier conversation, Hannibal spotted him inspecting one of the paintings on the wall, before his attention was drawn to another striking piece of decor. Hannibal was intrigued by his silent critique.

"Jack thinks I need therapy."

Hannibal appeared pensive, even when mirth flickered in his gaze. He recognized the vigilant nature of Will's watchful regard. He tilted his head.

"I'm not sure therapy will work on you. Stealing into other minds has taught you how to fortify your own."

Will nodded faintly in verification throughout Hannibal's entire response before he agreed, "That's what I said."

They took part in a knowing look.

"What you need is a way out of dark places when Jack sends you there."

Simple the fact, yet the expression on Will's face implied it had stunned him.

"Last time he sent me into a dark place I brought something back," he admitted in a manner that paralleled a confession. His careful wording rang in Hannibal's mind. Deliberately vague. Not quite acceptance, not quite denial.

"A surrogate daughter?" At that, Will opened his mouth to assert a rebuttal, but it never came. The very obvious battle in Will's mind was curious, and fortunately amusing to witness.

"Not cause I got too close to Hobbs."

Close. An understatement.

"You saved Abigail Hobbs' life. You also orphaned her. It comes with certain emotional obligations, regardless of empathy disorders."

"You were there. You saved her life, too. Do you feel obligated?"

Hannibal once again found himself delighted by the combative essence of Will's questions. They were his shield; a perfect method to divert analysis away from himself and instead to his analyzer. It further served as a way for him to pry into his interrogator.

"I feel a staggering amount of obligation. I feel responsibility. I've fantasized about scenarios where my actions have allowed a different fate for Abigail Hobbs." It wasn't a lie. He noted how the plain honesty of his answer hit Will with appreciation to an extent. Hannibal knew Will largely felt the same way.

"Jack thinks Abigail Hobbs might've helped her dad kill those girls," his return was abrupt. The stillness that fell between them was not short-lived.

Will looked openly bothered by the mere suggestion of it. To think that an innocent girl such as herself could have aided her father was blasphemy—it seemed his attachment had already grown out of hand.

"How does that make you feel?"

"How does it make *you* feel?"

A sly smile threatened to tug at the corners of Hannibal's mouth.

"I find it vulgar." Half-truth.

"Me, too," Will replied, his expression detached. They stared each other down, watching, waiting.

"And entirely possible." His statement caught Will off guard. Will instantly shook his head and gave him a level look.

“It’s not what happened,” Will refused. Hannibal considerably enjoyed watching him defend Abigail. His biases were already leaking into his thought process concerning the case, and for a second Hannibal theorized how far Will would go to protect the girl.

Or, more specifically, how far he would go to defend something he thought was right.

“Jack will ask her when she wakes up or he’ll have one of us ask her.” The idea of asking Abigail about her alleged assistance in the murders caused a burst of anticipation.

Will paused and tilted his head quizzically, “Is this therapy or a support group?” That time, Hannibal permitted the amusement to show on his face.

“It’s whatever you want it to be.”

The desk drawer opened with ease. Hannibal slid a thin stack of papers inside it before he wrapped his fingers around something that had been sitting near the edge of the drawer. He pulled it out delicately, then set his gaze upon it. A grin creeped on to his face.

A tiny twig. For anyone else, it was nothing to stop at; just another miniscule detail of nature. An everyday object that could be found lying in the grass, or on a sidewalk, anywhere that allowed trees to thrive.

This twig was not the former resident of a forest, however. It had not been a piece of a tree. It hadn’t flourished in soil, it hadn’t been nurtured by the elements, no. It was a product of Will’s creation.

It had been a leftover scrap from the branches that ravaged Hobbs. A plain little thing that happened to fall on the ground during the branches’ assault, a thing that had once participated in taking a life. Something that met numerous other bits and pieces just like it when it landed, small fragments of nature submerged in a pool of blood.

The crew had done an excellent job of clearing every single piece from the wreckage. All except one.

Hannibal pinched the twig between his thumb and index finger. A prize for his efforts—he’d snatched it in the midst of the chaos, when the paramedics finally got to Abigail. Easy to pocket. Everyone’s attention was elsewhere, after all.

The beginnings of a leaf bud caught his eye. The result of blooming curiosity, the very starting point of enlightenment; a shift in Will Graham. Exquisite, the specimen was. He had never seen anything like it. Appropriate, as neither he nor the world had ever quite seen anything like *Will* . Hannibal once deliberated adding it to one of the floral arrangements at his house, before the concept of displaying it in his domain struck him.

He could envision it clearly. A sliver of Will’s transcendent creation, presented for the entirety of the Lower World. Hannibal venerated the image.

For then, though, he would settle for keeping it in the confines of his office.

—

Gunshots rang through the small space of the stall. They ceased temporarily while the gun was reloaded, before the sound continued once more. Will blasted repeatedly at the target. He focused on the silhouette all the while, and maintained a careful aim. He then returned the target down-range and viewed his work, but he ended up less than pleased with the results.

“I’m pretty sure firearm ‘accuracy’ isn’t a prerequisite for teaching.”

The sudden comment from Beverly took him by surprise, and he turned to look at her for a moment before his attention snapped back to the target.

“I’ve been in the field before,” he told her, a clarification for his own reassurance.

“Now you’re back in the saddle. Ish.” Beverly smiled.

“Ish, indeed.” Will fired another round before his partial attention fell on her again. “Thought I’d get a refresher. I had meant to use a gun to drop Hobbs, anyway.” When he peered back at the target, his shots had landed all over the place.

“Zeller wanted to give you the sticks he pulled out of Hobbs in an acrylic case, but I told him you wouldn’t think it was funny.”

Will shrugged. “Probably not.”

“I suggested he turn them into a broomstick, the kind that you’d see witches holding in movies,” she mentioned, with the entertainment evident in her voice.

“Now that would have been funny.”

Will fired away at the target again, but his poor accuracy was retained. He missed it altogether. Beverly took notice of his stance and reached around to flare out his left elbow.

“See if that helps with the recoil.”

Will drew in a breath and fired again, watching as the bullets drilled the target in a more precise cluster. He hummed. “It’s better,” he faced her again, “You come all the way down here to teach me how to shoot?”

“No,” she began, “It’ll sound silly, but Jack sent me down here to find out what you know about gardening.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the comments, I love reading your thoughts!
Up next: *Freddie studied him, then the cushion, then him again. Her eyes narrowed. He could tell she was weighing her options, before she ultimately chose to do what he said. He placed his arm on the back of the seat.*
"Delete the conversations you recorded. Doctor-patient confidentiality works both ways," Hannibal demanded. She shrank under his gaze. She hesitantly pulled her phone out of her purse and held it in her palm, while her thoughts raced—until a puff of smoke promptly erupted from the phone.
Hannibal pretended as if he hadn't just been staring a bit too intently at it, and swiftly threw himself into an act of fretting over the smoke. "How curious."

Pleurotus Nidiformis

Chapter Summary

Being back in the field causes Will a tiny bit of trouble. Freddie makes an attempt to do some investigating.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Remote locations and barricade tape never mixed well.

The forest would have appeared perfectly calm if it weren't for the tell-tale lights of emergency vehicles that danced among its trees. It seemed like it would've been a very nice place for a hiking trip one day. Instead, Will was hiking along the grass for the purpose of reaching yet another crime scene. He silently evaluated what had become his routine.

Jack sighed next to him as they trudged through the dirt. Will glanced sideways at him. He wore stress on his face, or rather, stress wore him. It wasn't abnormal to see his eyebrows knitted together in thought, or concentration, or burden. Burden was a frequent visitor at Jack's door; no less than Jack's persistence was at Will's.

Besides the bright yellow tape, the body bags were the first things to meet their field of vision. One was placed onto a gurney as they approached, leaving five more on the ground. Will couldn't take his eyes off of them.

"Your evals went well. Lecter gave you the 'all clear.' Maybe therapy does work on you." They both slipped under the tape to join the scene before them. Will advanced several steps ahead of Jack before he gave his answer.

"Therapy is an acquired taste I have yet to acquire but sure served your purpose. I'm back in the field," the obvious dig at Jack did not pass by unnoticed. He eyed Will and recognized the dismissal in his voice, then bowed his head in the direction of the unearthed bodies.

"Local police found more small animal traps in the surrounding woods. They even discovered a thirty gallon drum of pesticide hidden in a hollow tree along with a rusted Radio Flyer wagon." Jack's short explanation certainly helped with grasping clarity. Will drank up the extra information as if he'd just stumbled upon a river in the middle of the desert's dry heat.

"Didn't want his 'crop' disturbed." Plain and simple; an obvious observation anyone could have made, yet Jack peered at him in a fashion that said it was news to him.

"All that's missing is a scarecrow."

They eventually came upon Zeller, Price, and Katz, all gathered around one of the corpses. Will and Jack took a spot next to Beverly as they tuned into the end of one of Price's assessments.

"Seven bodies, various stages of decay, all very well fertilized," he stated. When Will studied the body they hovered over, he was granted with the sight of a duct tape ridden face. Any and all traces of flesh were coated in fungus. *Human* wouldn't have been the first thought in Will's mind had he not known the context, instead, he would've heeded the rich black soil. Bountiful, fertile soil that perched in each shallow grave. Perfect for accelerating decomposition. He did his best to ignore the appreciation he experienced for the exemplary soil.

Zeller and Price went back and forth a few times with observations, during which Will realized he'd begun to space off. Scattered words made their way to him and allowed him to comprehend a portion of their conversation.

"—Line and rebar were to administer intravenous fluids after burial. He was feeding them something," Zeller's remark raised many questions. Will's racing thoughts picked up speed.

"No restraints? They weren't bound? Nothing to stop them crawling out?" His entourage of questions did not totally startle the rest of the group, but the moment of silence that followed said enough.

"Just dirt," Price replied, which prompted Beverly to lean forward and pull back the duct tape from the body's nose. Beneath was a breathing tube, stuffed into the nostrils. She let the view sink in for a second before she pointed to an area by the line of trees.

"The other end of the air supply system comes up over there." Will used her direction to investigate it—an umbrella on the ground, acting as a guard to the piece of tubing that lay under it. Beverly went on as he looked it over, "It isn't a very considerate clean air solution, which clearly wasn't a priority. 'Cause he's not lazy."

Will hummed in agreement. "No, he's not." He squinted back at the line of graves.

On cue, Jack jumped into action. "Let's clear the scene."

Just like that, everyone was herded outside the clearing, including EMTs and local police. In the blink of an eye, Will had once again become somewhat of an exhibit. He *truly* needed to reevaluate his choice of routine.

Small dirt mounds gave out underneath his shoes when he took his place in front of all seven graves. His eyelids sealed themselves shut. A deep breath; assisted by air that was ripe with the scent of compost.

The pendulum swings.

Will stood before a freshly dug pit. It was parallel to the six that came before it. Only one thing set it apart from the others—promise.

He looked on as his body moved, shovel in hand. It burrowed into moist dirt that spilled over the sides of the Radio Flyer wagon, that now was pulled next to the hole. Generous, abundant dirt. Crucial aid in the cycle of life and survival, sustainer of growth.

With the shovel postponed in the wagon, Will adjusted his attention to the subject settled in the grave. A man, lying, due to fulfill his role. Will loomed over him. He crammed an oxygen tube up the man's nose, followed by duct tape fixed upon his features. Nothing but attentive, he arranged the placement of the catheter.

"I choose this man. I do not bind his arm or legs as I bury him in a shallow grave. He is alive but will never be conscious again."

Simple words of praise wouldn't do it justice. It was the very image of beginnings. Nutriment for his garden; endless possibilities of prosperity. He thought fondly of how the fungus would help the land, and perhaps the man as well, or firstly, how they would help the fungus. It was surely going to thrive on the new addition. It deserved to *flourish* .

Will stepped out of the hole and took hold of the shovel's handle once more. Raised above the man, he rotated it, granting the grave a waterfall of the dark soil.

"He won't know he's dying. I don't need him to. This is my design."

Acquainted well with the sensation of vegetation on his skin, it took Will only milliseconds to recognize it when it slithered from his legs down to the foundation of the grave. Unlike previous instances, he made no effort to halt it. He'd be rooted into his garden. Merged. He would take part of the garden, just as the plants would absorb *him* .

When divided from the trance he was placed under by the greenery around his calves, his gaze pulled itself to the man below him. The duct tape had long since vanished. Garrett Jacob Hobbs—in place of the former victim—stared straight back at him. He donned a shrewd smirk. He almost wore his demise with pride. The branches in question snaked along his mangled body and began a path outwards. They mutely wailed for Will, reached for him with their angular limbs, begged to collect him in their arms. An embrace that would rival that of a couple reunited after many years of war. *Welcome home* .

Will fixed his eyes shut and forced a few labored breaths.

Again they opened to reveal the comforting sight of an open grave, housing not Hobbs, but the body from earlier, buried in fungus. His composure returned to him with a sigh of relief. No Hobbs, as well as no vegetation rooting him to the ground. Alone with the dead once more.

Snatch .

An arm coated with fungus gripped Will by the wrist. It shook as it held him, cold against his skin. Will immediately tore away from its grasp and stumbled backward.

A scream ripped through his throat.

—

“This may have been premature,” Will’s fatigue distorted his words in a way that almost overshadowed the action of pushing Hannibal Lecter’s own evaluation paper back to him. Contemplation was apparent in Hannibal’s stare, however brief, since he placed his fingertips on the paper and slid it right back.

“They’ll revoke my rubber stamp.” Hannibal met Will's gaze and held it. Will bowed his head ever so slightly.

“Maybe they should,” he retorted; it had meant to sound more hostile than it actually did. He gulped.

“What did you see? Out in the field?”

Will didn't like the hint of genuine, eager curiosity in his question. "Hobbs." Hannibal leaned forward faintly in reaction. The act urged forward a memory or two in Will’s mind of when he’d seen him do it previously. Silently, he weighed the chances of it being earnest, or a calculated move. He was inclined to believe the latter regardless of how balanced that chance was.

“An association?”

“A hallucination,” Will corrected, “I saw him lying there… in someone else’s grave.” The remaining details of his vision were left unspoken.

“Did you tell Jack what you saw?” concern, anticipation, Hannibal’s tone was cleverly devoid of any of it. For any authentic opinion of his, Will saw he would have to work for it, earn it.

“No.”

Will squinted and watched for any stray repercussion in Hannibal’s expression. All he was provided was a contemplative pause, zero disturbance. *Wouldn’t give himself away that easily* .

“It’s stress. Not worth reporting. The mechanism that distinguishes conscious perceptions from internal perceptions misfired,” Hannibal’s reasoning was credible, yet hesitation still resided in part of Will. ‘You displaced the victim of another killer’s crime with what could arguably be considered your victim.”

His counter was near immediate, defensive. “I don’t consider Hobbs my victim.”

“What do you consider him?”

“Dead.” While Will’s response to that one was also quick, and legitimate, some piece of it resonated with the storm that brewed inside him.

“Is it harder imagining the thrill somebody else feels killing now that you’ve done it yourself?” The assessment hit the nail directly on the head. Of course it was accurate, he’d never dream of one of Hannibal Lecter’s perceptions to be *wrong* . Will needed to work on his fort.

“Yes.”

Both of Hannibal’s brows raised in a show of appreciation for his straightforward honesty, something he allowed Will to see.

“The arms.” *God, the arms* . “Why did he leave them exposed? To hold their hands? Feel the life leaving their body?”

Will had to shake off the itchy feeling in his skin. “Too esoteric for someone who took the time to bury his victims in a straight line. He’s more practical.”

Hannibal’s inquiries about hands did not bring the image of human flesh to Will, not even a view of the arms that’d been carefully posed outside their own graves. Flesh turned to wood, wood turned to unyielding limbs with the determination to grasp him.

“He was cultivating them?”

“He was keeping them alive. Feeding them fluids intravenously.”

“Your farmer let his crops die, save for the one that didn’t.”

“The one that didn’t died on the way to the hospital,” Will said quickly, as if to dismiss the reminder of it. “They weren’t crops. They were the fertilizer. The bodies were covered in fungus.”

“Mycelium kill forests over and over, building deeper soil to grow larger and larger trees,” Hannibal offered up the fact to him, and to Will’s credit, he did him the courtesy of considering it with a thoughtful turn of his head. Nevertheless, he still drew his own conclusion.

“It’s not just about the soil. The structure of a fungus mirrors a human brain. It’s a web of connections—maybe he admires their ability to connect the way human minds can’t.”

Something indiscernible flashed across Hannibal’s face. Will caught it in the nick of time, a blink and he would’ve missed it. His guess would’ve been surprise, or even concurrence with his idea. It made more sense for it to be agreement; it would be somewhat foolish to disagree with Will Graham on the particular matter. More-than-intimate knowledge of all things botany brought him a level of expertise. Though Will did not take into account the part of the movement in his face that implied something akin to pride.

“Yours can,” Hannibal replied simply. The fact plunged through Will the moment it left Hannibal’s lips. It was by all means the truth. Whether he’d fully accepted it and faced it was an entirely different story, in an entirely different library. A law of his life he craved to abide by, yet break. To hear it spoken at him was an admission.

“Not with reciprocity,” a clarification Will felt was necessary. Unique form of justification.

“Is that what your farmer is looking for? Some sort of connection,” Another concept for Will to consider. He nodded slowly. Connection was not far-fetched, instead it suggested to be the common denominator.

“It’s very likely,” he began, “I saw roots. Rooted myself to the ground by the grave. Something he desires.”

Hannibal visibly perked at the mention of his gift. “Is he looking to sate hunger for something he cannot physically have?”

Will entertained the approach. It wouldn’t be completely unexpected. Despite having lived with his abilities his whole life, he understood the frustration one would feel if they could never experience anything similar, no matter how badly they ached for it. To endure such a connection, both blessing and curse, was a gift regardless.

“Something he wants either for himself or for others.” Attachment. Understanding. Who wouldn’t want to be properly *recognized* ?

Hannibal captured and retained Will’s gaze. Deep amber locked onto his bold blue.

“Practical yet reverent. Everyone, deserving of connection.”

—

Careful steps carried Hannibal back to Freddie Lounds’ side once the office door was gently shut behind them. He watched as she made a brief scan of the room. He was used to the scrutiny; nearly all of his patients took a fair amount of seconds to take in the scenery. Hannibal certainly wasn’t one for neglecting decoration and details. He gave the essential respect it demanded as a sort of art form. In truth, influence from his realm had a habit of trickling into his earthly aesthetic choices. Of course, his office was miniscule in comparison to the environment he usually paid mind to, but still received great care.

“Please take a seat, Miss Kimball.” Polite insistence, one of the things he was best at. Freddie nodded and obliged, appearing genial as ever with a smile plastered on her face. Hannibal claimed the chair opposite of her. Once seated, Freddie did not hesitate to begin her farce.

“I’ve never seen a psychiatrist before and I’m unfortunately thorough. So you’re one of three doctors I’m interviewing. It’s more or less a bake-off,” she explained, with a distinct lack of eye contact mostly the whole way through. He nodded anyway and displayed a welcoming grin.

“I’m very supportive of bake-offs. It’s important you find someone you’re comfortable with,” His answer was awfully reassuring, and would result in letting her guard down, if all went well.

She tossed a few red coils over her shoulder. “I can imagine you as my therapist, which is good. If I couldn’t visualize opening up emotionally, I know it would be a problem.” Hannibal had to give credit where credit was due, in that the sincerity in her voice was convincing.

“May I ask why now?”

“Would it be alright if I asked you a few questions first?”

That didn’t take long. He nodded his head, “Of course.”

“I love that you’ve written so much on social exclusion. Since that’s why I’m here, I was wondering—”

“Are you Freddie Lounds?”

The shift in the room would’ve been visible from miles away. She froze instantly, eyes widened, frantic. Her panicked stare played out a scene of thoughts that darted around her head. She collected a shallow breath in order to be able to get any words out.

“I am so embarrassed.” A restrained statement, from the looks of it. Mischief glinted in his eye.

“You should be,” any trace of welcomeness had evaporated, “This is unethical even for a tabloid journalist.”

Freddie sank further into her chair. “I’m a criminal justice journalist.”

Hannibal’s frown deepened as his attention was drawn to the purse in her lap. “I’m afraid I must ask for your bag.”

“What?”

“Your bag,” he repeated, “please hand it over. I’d rather not take it from you. Please.” The emphasis on ‘please’ was firm enough that she finally looked down at her bag, then held it out toward him. He thanked her when he took hold of it, then set it securely at his side.

“I was recording our conversation.” Not entirely a lie.

“Our conversation? Yours and mine?”

“Yes.”

“No other conversation?”

“No.”

He glanced at the purse, then stared Freddie down.

“You were very persistent about your appointment time. How did you know when Will Graham would be here?” Annoyance was made apparent on his face as his interrogation grew increasingly urgent.

“I may have also recorded your session with Will Graham,” Freddie admitted, avoiding his glare.

“You didn’t answer the question. How did you know?”

“I can’t answer that question,” she stated and crossed her arms, laced with shame. They both refrained from saying anything. Hannibal deliberated what his next move would be.

Eventually he patted the cushion next to him. "Come. Sit by me."

Freddie studied him, then the cushion, then him again. Her eyes narrowed. He could tell she was weighing her options, before she ultimately chose to do what he said. He placed his arm on the back of the seat.

"Delete the conversations you recorded. Doctor-patient confidentiality works both ways," Hannibal demanded. She shrank under his gaze. She hesitantly pulled her phone out of her purse and held it in her palm, while her thoughts raced—until a puff of smoke promptly erupted from the phone.

Hannibal pretended as if he hadn't just been staring a bit too intently at the phone, and swiftly threw himself into an act of fretting over the smoke. "How curious."

Freddie’s facial expression went wild with a mixture of alarm and confusion. A yelp escaped her as she gripped it tightly, in her dismay. Her hands performed a dance of uncertainty and bounced it between left and right. Hannibal made haste and disappeared into the hallway outside his office to the nearest bathroom. Freddie was on his heels as he glided around a corner and calmly tugged the bathroom door open. A line of smoke trailed closely behind them.

He plugged the sink’s drain and turned the faucet to the coldest setting. He seized the hazardous phone from her possession in one swift motion and plopped it at the bottom of the sink, under the running water. They both watched the smoke steadily dissipate, followed by a few odd noises from the phone itself. Satisfaction beamed in Hannibal at the sight of his work. *Well done* . His session with Will wouldn’t be going anywhere.

Simultaneously, Hannibal sighed and Freddie huffed. He turned to face her.

“You’ve been terribly rude, Miss Lounds. What’s to be done about that?”

Chapter End Notes

Bear with me as I figure out a consistent posting schedule, haha.
Introducing an aspect of Hannibal's abilities: Smoke!
Verrry canon compliant chapter this time around, but coming up we get to mix it up a little.

Let There Be Light

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has Jack over for dinner. Will does not appreciate Lounds' latest work.

Chapter Notes

Happy belated spring equinox!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Never partial to wrecking the refined floors, Hannibal always avoided emerging inside his Baltimore residence. A certain type of hassle followed with that decision, one that he was more than willing to endure. Comfort, more so privacy, wasn't always a priority.

Instead he favored a riskier approach. The spot to the side of his house worked wonders in the gloom of night. Additionally masked by the shadows of trees, he was undetectable, as always. Hannibal had a particular talent for going unnoticed.

The ground that had previously unfurled to allow his entrance now sealed itself shut as he stepped away. It rolled in waves below his feet in its effort to right itself. By the time he'd strolled a couple of feet away, it looked entirely undisturbed and intact.

The contrast between the interior of his house and the domain he just arrived from was almost nonexistent. The intimacy of the space endorsed usage of embellishments exclusively to his taste. Oftentimes, that included various antlers accompanied by their respective skulls, and paintings that left the viewer with uncomfortable questions to be answered. Hannibal couldn't help but appreciate his own composition each time he crossed the threshold. If anything could hold a candle to the natural allure of the Underworld, this house would be it.

Hannibal went straight to the kitchen. He very much considered it to be his secondary home. A place to create his *art* . The plate his canvas, the meat his paint. Complete with opportunities for experimentation and creative liberties. There, he could do whatever he wished.

It was slightly different from how he expressed himself down below the surface. Rules were an inevitable aspect of any society. Expectations. Etiquette, even. The Land of the Dead was no different; death involved a process with many variables to be considered despite how sudden it was. Countless shades to be dealt with, judgements to be made. Lost, blank eyes

pleading, sobbing, stuck in denial, that was how they all started out. There were customs to be upheld.

Hannibal retrieved a glass then reached for a fine bottle of wine. Indulgence in the small pleasure had joined the list of his daily habits a long time ago. If he was lucky enough, some days it would beckon a short-lived wave of calm over him.

After another sip or two, he set the glass down in favor of redirecting the spotlight to the loin dish that was to be served for dinner. Jack wasn't expected to arrive for another two hours, and Hannibal had already made the necessary preparations earlier in the day, but he enjoyed being marginally early. It was polite, after all.

No scent could compare to that of Hannibal Lecter's fabulous feasts. Everyone knew this. Except Jack Crawford, who had not yet had the privilege of learning the fact before that evening. If he didn't know it before, he definitely knew it then. It was something Hannibal had no problem with teaching him.

He was not oblivious to the way Jack regarded the dining table's centerpiece. Antlers were more prominent on the table than they were anywhere else in the house. They were embellished with a few select flowers, most of them blue in color. Hannibal saw appreciation in Jack's eye at most, but he knew for certain their tastes fell a fair distance from each other. Hannibal couldn't completely blame him; he simply didn't understand what he was looking at. A shame.

Jack met Hannibal's stare when the good doctor placed the delicately crafted dish in front of him. He fixed Jack with a smile, then peered down at the plate itself. *Marvelous* . Another gem to cherish for eternity in the palace of his mind.

"Loin served with a Cumberland sauce of red fruits. Strawberries, raspberries, currants." A detail he'd taken good time to ponder and refine. His choice to include his fondness for red fruits was perfectly reflected. It was an element he'd decided to include very early on in the process.

"What kind of loin?" Jack asked, though the question seemed to be an afterthought; his eyes were locked on the enticing sight of the plate, waiting.

"Pork," Hannibal replied evenly. He took a seat in front of his own plate at the opposite end of the table. Miles away, tucked into his own little world, he viewed Jack's reaction to the first taste. Delight was the first thing Hannibal was able to collect from the face he made. Then it twisted in thought for a split second, possibly a memory that had briefly resurfaced in Jack's mind, an intimate one.

Jack Crawford happened to be on the easier side when it came to reading people. Not exactly an open book, but there wasn't a lot he could hide. Stress had a tendency to make itself known.

“It’s rare I get a home-cooked meal. My wife and I both work. Hard as I tried not to, I married my mother,” Short and sweet, yet packed with material.

“Your mother didn’t cook?”

“She cooked. I just wished she didn’t. She used to make this dish she liked to call Oriental Noodles. Spaghetti, soy sauce, bouillon cubes and spam. I was a thin child,” he clarified as he savored another bite of the meal.

“Next time bring your wife. I’d love to have you both for dinner.” Hannibal concealed his lips with a sip from his wine glass. They both shared a look.

“I’m curious why Will went back to see you after you signed off on him. He was so adamant about not going to begin with.” Jack’s curiosity was not misplaced, from the outside it did seem to be a fast change of heart.

“I lost the stick, kept the carrot.” A quick thought entered Hannibal’s mind as to if Will obtained his vegetables from a regular grocery store or if he preferred to grow them himself. Any possible detail he could glean about Will’s preferences would have unspeakable value.

“Insisting on a psych eval for a guy like Will Graham is hardly a stick.”

“As a psychiatric professional, I feel duty-bound to point out that blackmailing somebody into therapy tends to negate positive benefits,” the obvious jab at Crawford did not escape him, and he discarded a response in favor of taking another sip of wine.

Jack hummed. “This wine is delicious.”

“Priorat from Catalonia,” Hannibal nodded in agreement.

Jack set his glass back down next to the plate, and focused back on the subject. “Why did he go back?”

“A guy like Will Graham?” Intensity seeped from the stare that followed. A second well-intentioned dig, yet the supposed warmth behind it was minimal. “I’m sure he recognizes the necessity of his own support structure if he’s to go on supporting you in the field. He’s aware he could become a liability otherwise.”

“A liability?”

“You saw what he is capable of.”

A beat passed as Jack marinated in the statement. Hannibal was sure he understood, yet something along the lines of conflict was made known in the way Jack shifted in his seat.

“Will Graham knows exactly what’s going on in his head, which is why he doesn’t want anyone in there," came his reply, which to him, was a fair rebuttal.

“Are you not accustomed to broken ponies in your stable?”

“You think Will’s a broken pony?” Jack asked.

“I think you think Will’s a broken pony. You ever lost a pony, Jack?”

Yet another pause. Hannibal watched as Jack seemed to mentally swat away a memory. The face of Miriam Lass, undoubtedly.

“If you’re asking if I’ve ever lost someone in the field, yes. Why?” he’d spoken fast enough it nearly came off as rejection of the matter.

“I want to understand why you’re so delicate with Will. Because you don’t trust him or because you’re afraid of losing another pony?” A question for an answer Hannibal was already aware of.

“I’ve had my psych eval.”

Hannibal smiled warmly. “Not by me. You’ve already told me about your mother. Why stop there?”

Jack showed off a charmed grin in return, but he stood his ground and merely turned back to his meal with no response. Hannibal followed suit and took another bite from his plate even though his eyes never left Jack.

Silence caught up with them.

—

Intricate connections beyond human comprehension.

They’d all died of kidney failure. Of course it was kidney failure. The fungus was not meant to kill them.

Beverly strode in, arms full with IV bags. Will looked away from the corpse between Zeller, Price, and himself and glanced at the bags.

“Dextrose in all the catheters. He probably used some kind of dialysis or peristaltic to pump fluids after the circulatory systems broke down,” she explained, emphasis placed on the IVs contained in her hands.

“Force-feeding them sugar water,” Will gathered.

“You know who loves sugar water? Mushrooms. They crave it. As much as a mushroom can crave anything,” Price mentioned, focused on the body, until he faced Will. “But you probably knew that.”

Joking manner or not, it fell flat with Will. He nodded half-heartedly. “They crave, like anyone else.”

Price clearly did not expect the retort; the surprise on his face was almost comical. Will had to push down the surge of satisfaction that climbed through him. Thankfully Zeller, as mildly-agreeable as ever, jumped in to save the day.

“Recovering alcoholics crave sugar.” Price shot him a look, incredulous. “Don’t take that personally.”

“I’m not recovering,” he blurted.

Triumphant, Zeller nodded in the direction of the corpse. “Feed sugar to fungus in your body, the fungus makes alcohol. It’s friends helping friends really.”

“Is someone preying on recovering alcoholics? Other than themselves?”

“Alcoholics aren’t the only ones with compromised endocrine systems,” Will mentioned, which snapped them both away from their little game. Beverly stood at attention.

Will extended his palm out in front of him and compelled the growth of a mushroom. It surfaced obediently in his hand then perched, as if waiting for further instruction. The sudden quiet was not unanticipated. Everyone was rendered speechless. Shock, fascination, both. Will brought it, *Omphalotus nidiformis* , closer to examine.

Zeller finally piped up with, "Wouldn't happen to be an alcoholic yourself, would you Graham?"

Will effectively ignored him. “They all died of kidney failure? Death by diabetic ketoacidosis?” he asked, purely to confirm his suspicions.

“Did you know they were diabetics?” Beverly immediately pointed the question at Zeller.

“We don’t know they’re diabetics,” he countered.

“They’re all diabetics. He induces a coma and puts them in the ground,” Will cut in. All three of them stopped in their tracks once again. Beverly was the only one who didn’t hide how impressed she was.

“How is he inducing diabetic comas?”

“He changes their medication. He’s a doctor or a pharmacist or works somewhere in medical services,” he clarified, which seemed to be good enough for them. Zeller and Price exchanged a glance.

“He buries them, feeds them sugar to keep them alive long enough for the circulatory systems to soak up,” Beverly’s conclusion was just right. Will gave her a knowing look, which she gave right back.

Price jumped in. “So he can feed the mushrooms.”

“We dug up his mushroom garden,” added Zeller.

The mushroom in Will’s palm disappeared back beneath his skin. “He’ll want to grow a new one.”

—

THE FBI’S SECRET WEAPON?

God damn it all. Will had to give some sort of credit, the article Freddie Lounds had cooked up about him was going stir just the right amount of fear and skepticism. Not to mention the views it would earn for Tattlecrime.com. Unfortunately the exposure meant something entirely different for him. It was not the first article she wrote about him, and it wouldn’t be the last, but none of them had revealed him quite like this one.

Will Graham was used to laying low. It was about to get a lot more difficult to keep it that way. Calling his mind demented was one thing, but displaying him and his vegetation in action for thousands to see was another.

Even worse, he had found the article pulled up on the computer at Eldon Stammets’ work station, the same man behind the mushroom garden. Stammets knew about him.

Will navigated the familiar interior of Johns Hopkins during his journey to Abigail Hobbs’ room. He was introduced to the space not too long ago, yet by that point he felt as if he knew it like the back of his hand. His visits were so frequent that he’d blended into the environment, and members of staff who used to acknowledge him no longer said anything. When he entered Abigail’s room, it was practically like walking through the door of his own home.

“Hello,” he greeted when he went in, despite knowing no response would come. The room was quiet save for the sound of the machines hooked up to the young girl. No reply indeed. Obligated by habit, he instantly claimed the same chair he always did against the wall.

In the chair next to his sat a neatly folded blanket. Surely a gesture by one of the staff. His fingertips glided over the cozy gray fabric while he made a mental note to thank them later.

“I hope your day wasn’t too troubling,” Will went on as he tucked himself in with the blanket. Still no reaction, per usual. He sighed and folded his arms together.

Will stared straight ahead. The room’s dull tones blurred in his vision over time, but Abigail unconscious on her bed was unwavering. She appeared as innocent as ever. No visible evidence of a murderous past, not even the thought of one. The possibility, however, could not be ruled out. Who’s to say she wasn’t at least aware of the missing girls’ true whereabouts? She certainly couldn’t.

Will didn't know what to think. Her innocence refused to budge in his mind, although everyone else insisted she knew something they didn't. Even Hannibal mentioned there could've been a grain of truth to the accusations.

He was not fond of Hannibal's suspicion of Abigail. He'd saved the girl's life and yet he still thought her capable of massacre. Hannibal's assumed willingness to protect her set Will a little more at ease, but he would have to continue to keep an eye on the good doctor, regardless of the measures it called for.

For now, Abigail was safe.

Will let the machines' low rumble lull him to sleep.

Click. Click. Click. Click.

Abigail's room was a bit dimmer. A sign of nightfall, or so Will thought. There was no sign of staff in the hall outside, no mumbling, no swinging doors.

Click. Click.

Except that. Footsteps, yes, but the speed was not quite right.

He creeped from his chair to the door and peered into the hallway. Dark emptiness.

Click. Click.

Will whirled his head in the direction of the echoed clicks. What he was met with left him frozen in place, but this time the fear was minimal. The stag.

It ambled down the hallway, unbothered. Instead of its head full of antlers held high, however, it was skewed downwards. Focused. Will followed its line of sight to the floor.

Whatever the hospital's flooring had been made of before, it was gone then. Replaced by hundreds, thousands, of mushrooms; an army. Each one was much tinier than both him and the stag, yet combined they loomed over the two of them. *Reached out* to them.

Hints of green pulsed within the mushrooms until they were louder, brighter, more radiant than anything Will Graham had ever seen.

Positively luminous . They were *glowing* .

The green glow filled the hallway to the brim with pure, magnificent light. Will couldn't tear himself away from it as it pooled in his vision.

Movement startled him—the stag had lifted its head. With its wreath of antlers restored to full height, it towered over Will once again, as it often did during its nightly visits.

Their eyes came together. Luminescent green reflected in the stag's pupils, giving depth to the deep black void. Will's glare deepened.

The stag took another step forward and crushed one of the glowing mushrooms below its cloven hoof. The sea of mushrooms reacted with a collective pulse of raging light.

Another wrathful pulse. Then another. Brighter, brighter, blinding, *vengeful* —

A few panicked breaths, and Will was awake. He found himself back in the chair, much to his surprise, along with much warmer surroundings. Soft mumblings bounced around the room. He couldn't quite make out what they were saying even as his senses returned to him.

Vision mostly cleared, the owner of the voice was revealed. Alana Bloom. She was perched next to Abigail's bed, book in hand.

"What are you reading?" Will urged, still half-asleep.

Her attention jumped to him at the sudden interruption. "Flannery O' Connor. When I was Abigail's age I was obsessed. I even tried to raise peacocks because she raised peacocks, but they're really stupid birds."

Will hesitated. "You could be reading to a killer."

"Innocent until guilty and all that," she replied instantly. Will should not have been as glad as he was to hear it.

"Am I making you nervous?"

"No, I'm making me nervous. I'm about to broach the subject of that 'Secret Weapon' article," she said, every bit calm and collected, with the exception of the cringe in her tone. He was unphased in spite of it.

"Oh, that. Did Jack send you?" Will's expression soured when he spoke. The last thing he wanted to do was think about the foolish article.

"I sent me," Alana set the book down and twisted to face Will head-on. He sighed.

"I don't think we've ever been in a room alone together. Have we?"

"I haven't noticed. Have we? Not that we're necessarily alone now," she peeked at Abigail, "Stop trying to change the subject."

"Back to Jack Crawford's weed wacker," he rubbed his face in both his hands.

"I can't believe she wrote that," Alana shook her head. She made her disapproval very clear. Will couldn't help but shrug.

"I can. It's kind of hilarious."

“Certainly creates an image, and it’s not even remotely true.” When Will said nothing back, she continued. “I don’t need to talk about it if you don’t.”

“We can talk about or not talk about whatever you want. Honestly, I was enjoying the story you were reading,” he mumbled as a grin tugged at his lips.

Alana flashed him a gentle smile. “Abigail Hobbs is a success for you.”

“She doesn’t look like a success.” As bad as it sounded, Will really had good intentions.

“Don’t feel sorry for yourself because you saved this girl’s life.”

“I don’t. I don’t feel sorry for myself at all. I feel good.” And it was the truth.

Lunch hadn’t solved every single one of Will Graham’s problems, but at least he was no longer left with the sensation of hunger. Maybe his brain would operate with a bit more clarity after getting something in his system.

He tapped his foot in the elevator when the confined space was invaded with high-pitched ringing. Vibration in his pocket signaled his phone as the source. He snatched it and without looking at the name on the screen, he pressed the green button to accept the call and placed it next to his ear.

“Hello.”

Alarmed breaths sounded from the other side. “Will—Stammets, he’s coming for Abigail Hobbs. He’s after you.”

Will didn’t hear the rest of it before he stuffed his phone back into his pocket. He had nothing left to do but run.

Chapter End Notes

It's insanely cool how there are mushrooms out there that glow. I couldn't NOT include them here, honestly.
I'm excited for what comes after this chapter. Time to shake things up!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!